

3/5/77

Dear Mr. Sharrett,

Much as I enjoy philosophical discussion I cannot permit myself to do for them because I cannot begin to keep up with what I must do.

I understood your quandry without your letter of the 4th, save for your personal knowledge of Philadelphia. Mine goes back farther than yours, I dare say. I was born there.

But except as a track record the Philadelphia Sprague is irrelevant to the House Sprague. I have had personal dealings with him since 10/20/77 and on the basis of them I tell you without any equivocation that he is a practising authoritarian and a man whose word could not be more worthless.

Whatever your experiences with the Phila. ACLU the could not have been more correct in describing him as one totally uncocerned about basic legal rights. This is what I broke off with him over. And his lies to me personally in the form of personal assurances.

If you could think for a moment like Occam rather than the Chinese and ask yourself what one constructive thing he has done with six months, an initial \$150,000 and more than \$80,000 in the succeeding months I think you will find your own answer. It is, to my knowledge, only bad. If he had taken the job to wreck the committee he could not have succeeded better. And when I consider his unquestionable competence and considerable experience, when I believe that he knew better, I cannot but wonder.

Neither the Times nor any other paper has ever been friendly to me. I know they all are as you say. But the plain and simple fact is that by traditional standards the Burnham story and other like it of which I am aware are understated. The facts of a more severe, more principled indictment.

There is no way of making anything better than a lightweight of Gonzalez. However, in his break with Sprague he was absolutely correct and for those who wanted this committee continued, of whom I am not one, what he did is the one way it could have been save from the abdication of the Members overwhelmed by the Yablonsky Sprague and from his personal behavior, which can't be pardoned on any ground.

Last year a good reporter who is also a good friend phoned me after he had obtained a list of the then employees and their pay. He came to a woman just out of college, no prior work experience, read of her salary, something like more than \$15,000, and commented only "Sprague's pussy." Since then I have heard of other cases. The woman who made the notes on what Gonzalez used against Sprague was hired by Sprague when she was without a job, asked for her prior salary, and he said let's make it \$2,000 more. The largest single December expenditure was \$9,000 for phones, mostly to Phila., where neither JFK nor Kin was offed. He continues his law practise (he ~~was~~ called me from Phila.) and his Temple teaching. When he insisted on being a dictator, not only chief counsel but also staff director? What kind of mind conceives these are part-time?

I don't know what the prospects are. I do know that given a choice between this committee, no matter how it is changed, limited or strengthened, and no present committee the one thing of which I am certain is that there is nothing good that now can come of this committee.

This is based on my personal experiences and my knowledge of what they have done and have refused to do and have failed to do. They could have broken both cases open in no-time at all. Sprague agreed to what would have done it and then did not. He has been chasing all the spook ghosts instead and writing reports with the specific preconception of Ray's guilt and the inherent one of Oswald's. For that we need a committee? To exculpate all of those with whom in his Philadelphia career Sprague was close?

Please excuse the errors. I am pressed for time.

Best wishes, and with hope,

Christopher Sharrett  
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March 4, 1977

Mr. Harold Weisberg  
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Frederick, MD 21701

Dear Mr. Weisberg:

Thank you for your remarks on Lou Gordon; I wondered just how interested Gordon is since he has done many programs on the assassinations but still takes a negative stance vis a vis the subject.

I was a bit disturbed by your very negative feelings toward the Assassinations Committee. I too have some misgivings about the panel and Congress generally and have become particularly annoyed by the goings-on down there recently, but I don't think it's fair to make a blanket judgment on the overall project as yet. I am quite certain that the larger part of the "controversy" regarding Sprague was fabricated by the media and believe this is provable by tracing the Committee back to its origin—at the start there was little complaint about the budget (in fact Frank Thompson said it "would almost certainly go through") or Sprague's methodology until CBS and the New York Times had their say. It is also clear to me that the articles by Burnham could only have come about through his being permitted to spend a good deal of time and money on a research project aimed strictly at defaming Sprague. I have followed Sprague's career for a number of years for a variety of reasons and can find little fault with the man. Sprague virtually ran the D.A.'s office in the 60s while Specter appeared on TV talk shows or did politicking for Nixon...few people outside of Philadelphia realize there has been some subtle antipathy between Specter and Sprague for years, even though Specter is forced to support him publicly. I find the accusations of "impropriety" and "unethical conduct" ridiculous and hypocritical coming from the Congress; what standards, after all, is Congress trying to uphold? I find myself forced to take an increasingly radical view of this situation, i.e., it is impossible to speak of "propriety" in a land where law is used simply as a means of misleading the public or even disrupting traditional standards of morality—of course you realize how bankrupt our judicial system really is given what has taken place in the past fifteen years.

In any event, I am not at all impressed by the charges against Sprague. Most of the allegations regarding his Phila. period were kept alive by people like Spencer Coxe, president of the local ACLU; Coxe has said that Sprague has "a black-and-white view of good and evil." When I have asked Coxe to present more evidence or explanation he has failed to do so. What all this amounts to is a lot of big-city hogwash coming back to haunt Sprague (Phila. is one of the dirtier cities when it comes to political in-fighting). Frankly, I am not all that concerned with how unscrupulous Sprague is so long as he gets the job done and done right. Perhaps this is an excessively pragmatic attitude, but, again, I will not be fooled by bogus outrage and criticism aimed primarily at derailing the probe. You say that the investigation has started with preconceptions; from my contact with Sprague and that of other researchers both Sprague and Tannenbaum



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have maintained a considerable degree of objectivity. What has pleased me is that already the entire staff, particularly Tannenbaum and the senior researchers, seems convinced of evidence of conspiracy in both cases and they are not buying the Castro-revenge line. The biggest indication to me that the probe was on the right path is the tremendous amount of criticism arrayed against the Committee plus the varied and multifaceted forms of attack. Certainly if you are familiar with the Garrison trial all this must look very peculiar, as if one is experiencing deja vu.

Of course I cannot be certain what is really going on down there or if we are being played for fools, but I think I can see into the situation a bit clearer than the average reader of the Times. The current Gonzalez business is especially mind-boggling, considering Henry was the most ardent supporter of investigations and now he is acting positively px schizoid. I cannot believe this recent debacle is simply the result of personality conflicts or debate over budgets, but we will have to wait for the truth of the matter.

I suppose the real point is where shall we go from here if this investigation fails to get off the ground? I can't see going on with this for another 13 years or in having independent researchers continue to carry the ball. Private researchers have always had low credibility due to the hostility of the media (as you of course realize) and the most they can do is keep the issue alive. The problem is officialdom must eventually take action on this if we are to rewrite history and return this democracy to the control of the citizenry. Without the help of the Congress, however impotent it may be, I cannot see any answers since every other branch of government is hardly interested, to put it mildly. Of course there is incompetence, stupidity and immorality in this Committee and Congress generally, but where is there any institution not so tainted?

I hope this rather run-on letter hasn't been too tiresome for you. If you have some concrete information on this Committee and its membership I wish you would let me know. Most of us feel bewildered and disheartened by this mess since a Congressional inquiry has been a goal for some time. Thank you again for your many efforts on this vital issue.

Sincerely

  
Christopher Sharrett